

Washington Relaxes COVID-19 Restrictions

February 24, 2022

Related Services

COVID-19
Disability, Leave and Health
Management
Leisure
Workplace Safety and Health

Following the lead of many other states, Washington Governor Jay Inslee has announced that the state is moving into a less restrictive phase of the COVID-19 response.

New Mask-Free Zones

Inslee has amended his “Washington Ready” Proclamation ([20-25.18](#)) to immediately allow all outdoor workers to go mask-free. Fully vaccinated workers can go without masks indoors if they are in areas where no customers, volunteers, visitors, or non-employees are present.

Beginning March 21, 2022, the state will no longer mandate face coverings indoors in businesses, grocery stores, retail establishments, restaurants, bars, gyms, recreational centers, indoor athletic facilities, schools, childcare facilities, libraries, or houses of worship. However, private businesses can still choose to require employees, customers, or residents to wear face coverings.

The Secretary of Health also amended its statewide facemask order ([Order 20-03.7](#)) to immediately lift the mask requirement for outdoor events or gatherings attended by at least 500 people.

Places Where Masking Must Continue

Even after March 21, 2022, the general mask requirement will continue in healthcare settings (such as hospitals, outpatient facilities, and dental offices), long-term care settings, public transit, taxis, rideshare vehicles, and correctional facilities. Federal law still requires face coverings in certain settings, such as public transportation and school buses.

Unvaccinated workers also must continue to wear masks indoors at jobsites until further notice.

Right to Mask

As an added measure, Inslee amended [Proclamation 21.08-1 \(Safe Workers\)](#) to protect employees from discipline for choosing to wear a face covering at work. This is consistent with a similar law, RCW 49.17.485(2), passed in 2021, which protects a worker’s right to wear a face covering and other personal protective equipment during a public health emergency.

Vaccination Verifications

Beginning March 1, 2022, statewide vaccine verification for large events will no longer be required. No other changes to state vaccination rules have been announced.

King County (which includes Seattle) announced that, beginning March 1, its restaurants, bars, theaters, and gyms will no longer be required to check the vaccination status of their patrons. Businesses will be free to impose their own vaccination requirements if they choose, but the countywide requirement will disappear. The same is true for outdoor events in King County with more than 500 people, like concerts and sporting events.

All violations of state Proclamations are subject to criminal penalties (as is the case with all of the governor’s recent Proclamations).

Reopening orders contain extensive requirements creating compliance issues that can vary significantly depending on the specific state or local jurisdiction. Jackson Lewis attorneys are closely monitoring updates and changes to legal requirements and guidance and are available to help employers weed through the complexities involved with state-specific or multistate-compliant plans.

If you have questions or need assistance, please reach out to the Jackson Lewis attorney with whom you regularly work, or any member of our [COVID-19 team](#).

©2022 Jackson Lewis P.C. This material is provided for informational purposes only. It is not intended to constitute legal advice nor does it create a client-lawyer relationship between Jackson Lewis and any recipient. Recipients should consult with counsel before taking any actions based on the information contained within this material. This material may be considered attorney advertising in some jurisdictions. Prior results do not guarantee a similar outcome.

Focused on employment and labor law since 1958, Jackson Lewis P.C.'s 1,000+ attorneys located in major cities nationwide consistently identify and respond to new ways workplace law intersects business. We help employers develop proactive strategies, strong policies and business-oriented solutions to cultivate high-functioning workforces that are engaged and stable, and share our clients' goals to emphasize belonging and respect for the contributions of every employee. For more information, visit <https://www.jacksonlewis.com>.